

Peregrine Falcon

Description:

The peregrine falcon is perhaps the fastest animal on earth reaching speeds of over 200 miles per hour when diving in pursuit of prey. Falconers choose peregrines to hunt other birds because of their flight speed and agility. Peregrines have also been called duck hawk, great-footed hawk, and wandering falcon.

What Does it Look Like?

Adult peregrines have blue-gray wings, a dark gray back, buff colored underside, dark head, and white cheeks with dark "sideburns". Like all falcons, peregrines have pointed, tapered wings, a short, narrow tail, a hooked beak and strong talons. The underside of the wings and tail are barred gray and black.

Both males and females are similar in plumage, but females are larger and more heavily marked. Immature peregrines are brown instead of gray, and their underparts are streaked, not barred. In dry or cool climates, peregrines will be paler in coloring than their counterparts that live in more humid or warmer areas.

Need more on how to find this falcon? Peregrine falcons are about the size of a crow, and their voices are a series of loud, shrill, coarse, "kek-kek-kek-kek-kek-kek" sounds. Peregrines like to fly high in the sky and have a straight, fast flight with rapid, strong wing beats.

Prairie Falcons?

The falcon most likely to be confused with a peregrine falcon is the prairie falcon. Prairie falcons have a narrower moustache and dark 'wingpits', but lack the dark hood. They also tend to be browner in coloration compared with the grayer peregrine falcon. Peregrins could possibly be confused with American kestrels which are much smaller and have a double facial stripe, and merlins which are smaller and slimmer, and have only very weak facial stripes.

Cliffs or Buildings

Peregrines are found in a variety of habitats, often on cliffs for nesting and open areas for foraging. Such areas include tundra, savannahs, seacoasts, mountains, open forested regions and cities. Ironically, cities offer tall buildings with ledges for nesting and roosting as well as large populations of pigeons and starlings for food. The only environment in which peregrine falcons do not live are rainforests and/or cold, dry arctic regions. In Idaho, nest sites are located in both mountain and desert regions and are generally near bodies of water.

Birds of Prey

Peregrine falcons may hunt anytime during the day, but they usually hunt in morning or evening. They prey almost exclusively on birds such as starlings, doves, pigeons, shorebirds, waterfowl, and passerines. They will occasionally eat bats and other small mammals, lizards, fish and insects. In Idaho, their diet consists almost entirely of birds.

Peregrines may use a variety of hunting techniques, but typically they search while flying or from their perch. Then, they dive from high above and capture the prey in the air. The pointed, tapered wings and short, narrow tail of peregrine falcons help them reach speeds up to 70 mph in direct pursuit of prey. During their spectacular hunting dives from heights of over a half mile, the peregrine may reach speeds of 200 mph as it drops toward its prey.

The main predator of the peregrine falcon is the golden eagle, although the great horned owl is a serious nest predator. Severe weather may cause a number of peregrine deaths throughout their northern range.

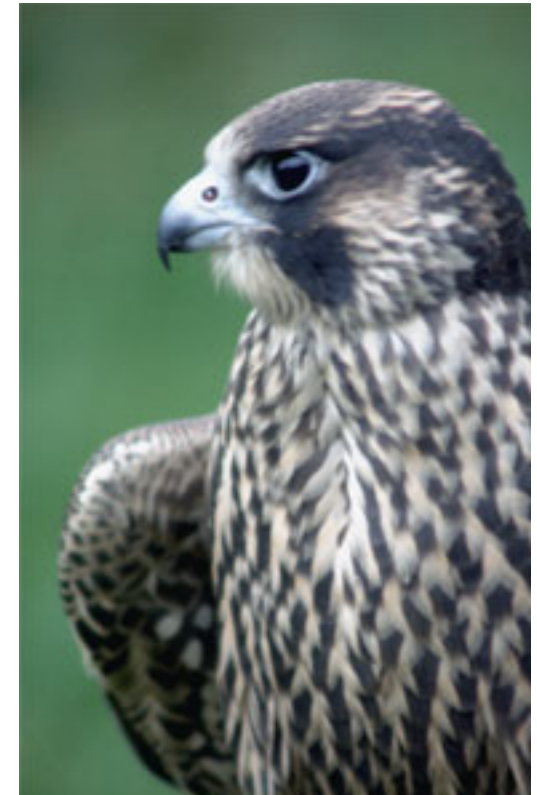
Reproduction and Offspring

Peregrine Falcons begin reproducing around their third year. The male Peregrine is referred to as a tiercel and the female as a falcon. Peregrine Falcons lay three to four eggs, which are reddish brown with darker brown blotches. Their nest, called an eyrie, is usually chosen near the center of their approximately 30-mile home range. They are quite territorial, driving other raptors away from their nest site.

Worldly Birds

The name "peregrine" means wanderer and the peregrine falcon is found worldwide except for Antarctica, making them one of the most widespread birds in the world. Peregrines also have one of the longest migrations of any North American bird. These tundra-nesting falcons winter in South America, and may travel 15,500 miles in a year. Maps of the migration of individual falcons can be seen at Environment Canada.

Like the osprey and bald eagle, peregrine populations were decimated by DDT which led to the extinction of the birds over many portions of their range. In the United States, they were completely eliminated from their traditional ranges east of the Mississippi River. Concerned ornithologists and falconers banded together in a massive effort to save the species. Captive birds bred at the Peregrine Fund facilities provided over 4,000 captive-bred birds that were released into former peregrine falcon territory in 28 states. Thanks to these efforts, the peregrine falcon is no longer considered an endangered species. Populations in Idaho have rebounded and these beautiful birds are once again claiming the cliffs and skies over much of our state with more than 17 nesting pairs.



Peregrine Falcon
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No Footprint
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Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Peregrine Falcon
2. **Scientific Name:** *Falco peregrinus*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: Male 20-25 oz.
Weight: Female 32-40 oz.
Length: Male- 15-18 inches.
Length: Female- 17-21 inches.
Wingspan: Male- 37-43 inches. Wingspan:
Female- 43-46 inches.
5. **Diet:** Starlings, doves, pigeons, shorebirds, waterfowl, and passerines.
6. **Young:** 3-4 per year; called chicks.
7. **Lifespan:** 2-8 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves

Order: Falconiformes

Family: Falconidae

9. **Hunted In Idaho:** No

10. **Hunting Link:**